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## "A Mighty Change"

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C. Max Caldwell

## Introduction

In a recent stake conference I attended, the General Authority Visitor counseled members to be more than “Cosmetic Mormons.” He suggested that membership in the Church must mean much more than church attendance.

In April 1951, President Spencer W. Kimball declared, “There are many people in this Church today who think they live, but they are dead to the spiritual things. And I believe even many who are making pretenses of being active are also spiritually dead. Their service is much of the letter and less of the spirit” (“Be Valiant” 432–34). President Ezra Taft Benson has reminded us of the Lord’s definition of Church membership: “Whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church” (D&C 10:67). And he has taught that an “important principle for us to understand if we would be true members of the Church is that repentance involves not just a change of actions, but a change of heart” (“Mighty Change” 2).

In this chapter I will use as my primary text Alma’s great discourse to the citizens of Zarahemla found in the fifth chapter of the Book of Alma. Excluding the Savior’s teachings, I consider Alma’s sermon on the need for a change of heart as one of the greatest recorded in all holy writ. The change involved is a conversion from one state of being to another and has been variously described by latter-day Apostles. Notice how each of the following emphasizes the change that takes place.

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For instance, Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:

In the full gospel sense, however, *conversion* is more—far more—than merely changing one's belief from that which is false to that which is true; it is more than the acceptance of the verity of gospel truths, than the acquirement of a testimony. To convert is to *change* from one status to another, and gospel conversion consists in the transformation of man from his fallen and carnal state to a state of saintliness. A convert is one who . . . has been born again: where once he was spiritually dead, he has been regenerated to a state of spiritual life. . . . He *changes* his whole way of life, and the nature and structure of his very being is quickened and *changed* by the power of the Holy Ghost. (*Mormon Doctrine* 162; emphasis added)

The rebirth process was described by Elder Mark E. Petersen as follows:

That birth of the spirit means something more than most of us normally realize. Through proper teaching, a conviction is born in our soul. Faith develops. Through it we see how important it is to become like Christ. We see ourselves as we are in contrast to a Christ-like soul. A desire for a *change-over* is born within us. The change-over begins. We call it repentance. Through our faith and as part of our conversion or change from one state to another, we begin to see sin in its true light. . . . We strive with all our souls to become like the Savior. (11 July 1956; emphasis added)

President David O. McKay declared:

No man can sincerely resolve to apply in his daily life the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth without sensing a change in his own nature. The phrase "born again" has a deeper significance than many people attach to it. This *changed feeling* may be indescribable, but it is real. Happy the person who has truly sensed the uplifting, transforming power that comes from this nearness to the Savior, this kinship with the Living Christ. ("Divine Church" 7; emphasis added)

And from Elder Marion G. Romney, we learn the following:

As used in the scriptures, "converted" generally implies not merely mental acceptance of Jesus and his teachings but also a motivating faith in him and in his gospel—a faith which works a transformation, an actual *change* in one's understanding of life's meaning and in his allegiance to God—in interest, in thought, and in conduct. While conversion may be accomplished in stages, one is not really converted in the full sense of the term unless and until he is at heart a

new person. "Born again" is the scriptural term. (23; emphasis added)

## An Ancient Prophet Speaks

### *The Problem*

In the century before the coming of Christ, Alma observed a spiritual deterioration among the Nephite members of the Church. The Book of Mormon records that they "began to wax proud"; there "began to be great contentions among the people of the church"; the "wickedness of the church was a great stumbling-block"; and "the church began to fail in its progress" (Alma 4:6, 9-10). The seriousness of this condition caused Alma such great concern that he gave up his office as chief judge over the Nephites that he might go among them to "stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, *by the word of God*, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people" (Alma 4:19; emphasis added).

### *The Solution*

Alma could see there was "no way that he might reclaim [his people] save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them" (Alma 4:19). Knowing the need for the Church members to experience a change of heart, he delivered powerful sermons throughout the land, beginning with the people of Zarahemla. He was true to his original intent as he identified his teachings as the word of God, not his opinion, with noticeable frequency throughout his discourses.

Using the techniques of a master teacher, Alma began his sermon by selecting familiar incidents of the past. He noted how the Lord had delivered His people from bondage on previous occasions, emphasizing that this freedom was not obtained through the wisdom or cunning of men, but rather came as the result of divine intervention and "by the power of his word" (Alma 5:5).

### *A Prophet Inquires*

Alma then asked the Church members three questions (Alma 5:6), each of which dealt with an increasingly important point of emphasis. First, he asked if they recalled the captivity of their fathers. Next, he asked if they remembered that their deliverance was much more than just a deliverance from physical bondage—they had been in spiritual bondage, and the Lord had extended his mercy and long-suffering in their behalf. The real issue was that the Lord had provided them with a freedom from sin. Alma then intensified his point with a third question, asking if they realized that the Lord had actually provided His people with the deliverance of their souls from hell.

Each of the three questions contained the phrase, "Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance?" It was not a matter of having intellectual recall of historical events. The people may have been capable of rehearsing the factual details, but the question went further: Have you sufficiently remembered? Alma seems to have been asking if their awareness of information included an understanding of its application and value to them. That he had asked seems to imply that he felt they had missed the message.

Scriptural usage of the word *remembrance* often suggests more than recall of memory. The Lord has directed us to "always remember him" (D&C 20:77), though he surely would not expect a constant mental focus on him to the exclusion of all other subjects or thoughts. Rather, we should remember never to deviate from the teachings and influences of the Lord and his spirit. Thus, remembering him would show in how our lives reflect the Lord's standards and teachings.

Alma's inquiries about a "sufficient remembrance" imply that *sufficient* means not only an adequate amount, but also a quality level of awareness of the Lord's blessings. Alma had undoubtedly learned the need for "remembering" from the angel who appeared to him while he was still mired in sin. He was told, "Go, and *remember* the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and *remember* how

great things [the Lord] has done for them” (Mosiah 27:16; emphasis added). That message triggered a chain of events that resulted in a mighty change occurring in Alma’s soul. Is it any wonder that Alma often chose a similar method of instructing the Saints (see Alma 9:9-10; 29:11; 37:29)?

### *Progenitors Experienced Change*

After emphasizing the need for the people to remember the events of the past, Alma declared that the Lord had changed the hearts of their forebears. He had awakened them from a deep spiritual sleep by the light of the word of God. Though they were unaware, they had been facing everlasting destruction because their real bondage was spiritual—caused by the binding power of the “chains of hell” (Alma 5:7).

And what are the chains of hell? To the rebellious Church members in Ammonihah, Alma warned of these chains in the following way: “And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell” (Alma 12:11). From his prison in Liberty, Missouri, the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote of the Satanic spirit that had “so strongly riveted the creeds of the fathers, who have inherited lies, upon the hearts of the children, and filled the world with confusion . . . and is now the very mainspring of all corruption” (D&C 123:7). He further referred to this Satanic influence as “an iron yoke, a strong band, handcuffs, chains and shackles, and fetters of hell” (D&C 123:8) In other words, Satan uses false ideas to bind people in a state of spiritual bondage which can only be overcome by an awareness and acceptance of the word of God.

Centuries before Alma, Lehi also pleaded with his sons to “awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe”

(2 Nephi 1:13). He challenged them to awaken and “put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound” (2 Nephi 1:23). From a latter-day revelation we note that the “armor of righteousness” that would release them from the chains of hell includes the sword of the Lord which is his word (see D&C 27:18; 33:1). Where do we find this valuable piece of armor, this word of the Lord?

### *Sources of “The Word”*

Though the Lord is the ultimate source of all truth, he uses at least three means to make the word of truth available to us. The word may come to us through (1) scriptural records, (2) the teachings of living prophets, and (3) the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, or any combination of these three. Jacob declared, “We search the prophets [scripture], and we have many revelations [living prophets] and the spirit of prophecy [testimony of Jesus provided by the Holy Ghost]” (Jacob 4:6; see also D&C 52:9, 36). We are not only instructed in the ways of the Lord, but we are also protected from being deceived by having an understanding of absolute truth. Any opinion or philosophical declaration that is out of harmony with the word of God is unacceptable and should be discarded in favor of the truth. Thus, the word of the Lord is a sword, a weapon of righteousness that cuts through the spiritually binding powers of the chains of hell.

Those who lay hold of the word of truth and trace it to its original source come to Christ (see Moroni 7:19). Gospel truths are as the spokes of a wheel, all emanating from Christ who is the hub. Anyone who would accept and lay hold on these truths is automatically led to their author, Jesus Christ. This experience is depicted in Lehi’s dream as holding on to the iron rod, or word of Christ which leads people to him. In reality, people are led to partake of the fruit of Christ—the fruit of the tree (see Alma 5:34)—which is his atonement. Thus, the center, the hub of life needs to be not just Christ, but rather what he did. Thus, when we come unto Christ, what we really do is come to

partake of his atonement and thus our hearts are changed as certainly as was Lehi's.

Alma finished his historical review of the spiritual transformation of the fathers by declaring that the chains of hell were loosed from them and they were saved.

### *Conditions of Hope for Salvation*

Still speaking in the context of that experience, Alma asked his congregation to consider the basis upon which salvation had been promised. He asked, "what grounds had they to hope for salvation? What is the cause of their being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell?" (Alma 5:10). Answering his own questions, Alma then noted four conditions that had to exist for them to obtain a hope for salvation.

1. Follow the living prophet. They had to believe in the words of the prophet Abinadi when he spoke "the words of God" (Alma 5:11). Likewise they had to follow the prophet Alma as he taught and led them through their periods of bondage. They did so with "patience and faith," (see Mosiah 23:21; 24:16). Consistently, the Church in our own dispensation has been commanded to "give heed unto all [the prophet's] words and commandments . . . as if from mine own mouth, in all *patience and faith*" (D&C 21:4-5; emphasis added). Why are patience and faith needed? Sometimes the prophet teaches or counsels on subjects or in ways not acceptable to some of the people. They may not see the reason to follow his instructions. But the Lord said to have patience, for in time the reason for such obedience will be manifest to all. In the meantime, the people have been commanded to have enough faith to act according to heavenly counsel based on the vision and understanding of a prophet and seer. If people wait to act until they see the reason, they may wait too long. To those who faithfully follow the Lord's living prophet comes the promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail" (D&C 21:6). We remember that the entire Book of Mormon scenario began with the story of Lehi listening to and following the counsel of living prophets.



2. Have a mighty change wrought in the heart. Throughout scripture, the heart is mentioned symbolically as the repository of our feelings. After his masterful and inspired sermon, king Benjamin asked his people if they believed the words he had spoken. Their unanimous response was, "Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought *a mighty change in us, or in our hearts*, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2; emphasis added). They continued by saying, "And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things" (Mosiah 5:5). Any previous inclination to sin or be unfaithful to covenants had been replaced with the change of their very nature. Their feelings or desires had been changed as they had partaken of the fruit of the Atonement. People who are changed internally manifest that transition through a change in behavior externally. What we are determines what we do. Outward motions are predicated upon inward emotions, or feelings.

We cannot bring about such a change in ourselves or others. It only comes from an internal conversion through the workings of the Spirit of the Lord. President Benson has said, "The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mold men by changing their environment. Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature" ("Born of God" 6).

King Benjamin was pleased with the response of his people and identified the source and nature of the change as follows: "And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore,

ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7).

This spiritual rebirth is actually a third birth. The first took place in the premortal world where all were born as spirit children of heavenly parents. We were called the sons and daughters of God, and spoke to and of him as our Father. Next, we came into mortality. All of us were born as physical children of earthly parents and subsequently forgot our previous residence, associations, and parentage. We received the name of our earthly fathers, and learned to speak to and of them as our father. Finally, being born again, or experiencing a spiritual rebirth, is to receive the redeeming powers of the Atonement, to be cleansed in the spirit and become innocent again, as we were at the time of our first and second births. With this rebirth comes the spirit of the Holy Ghost and the power and responsibility to remember a previously forgotten Father. We also become eventual heirs of another physical or resurrected body; therefore, we take the name of Christ in the rebirth experience, since he is the father of both processes. We then are called the sons and daughters of Christ.

When Alma experienced his own spiritual rebirth, he learned from the Lord that the requirement for spiritual rebirth pertains to all mortals:

Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. (Mosiah 27:25–26)

Such a spiritual, internal transformation is truly described as a “mighty change.”

3. Trust in the true and living God. Trust in God is the fruit of faith. Unless we have an awareness of and confidence in God’s knowledge and power, we will not adhere to or obey his laws and commandments. Without faith in an unseen yet living Lord, we mortals lack reason to act in accordance with revealed

law. This is especially true when divine directives cause discomfort or inconvenience or require sacrifice.

Who would go through the uncomfortable process of repentance without a love for God and a conviction that following the Savior's way is essential to happiness and salvation? Would many of us sacrifice time and resources in giving service in the kingdom, without the spiritual assurance that such provides us hope and blesses others? How many would attend to temple ordinances without a personal witness that work done in those holy houses is eternal? Trust in God is essential before anyone can hope for salvation.

Perhaps the condition opposite to trusting in the Lord is setting our hearts upon the things of the world. Such things can be seen as the means of providing immediate satisfaction and reward for temporal labor. Alma warned against following this philosophy in a sermon he preached to the citizens of Gideon, when he said, "I trust that ye have not set your hearts upon riches and the vain things of the world; yea, I trust that you do not worship idols, but that ye do worship the true and the living God, and that ye look forward for the remission of your sins, with an everlasting faith, which is to come" (Alma 7:6).

Placing our trust in *things* rather than in a living God is idolatry. President Spencer W. Kimball identified the practice of idolatry as "among the most serious of sins" and described its object as "anything which is earthly in any form. It would include both tangible and intangible things, and everything which entices a person away from duty, loyalty, and love for and service to God" (*Miracle of Forgiveness* 40). Whereas things are neither living nor true, God is.

4. Endure to the end. In our dispensation, the Lord declared, "He only is saved who endureth unto the end" (D&C 53:7). It is not enough to forsake the world by coming unto Christ in the covenant-making process of baptism. We must continue in the struggle to overcome the world by keeping the conditions of that covenant. Yielding to the enticings of Satan at any time after coming unto Christ takes personal purity and

spiritual power away from us. Even though we may live a significant portion of our lives in righteousness, we cannot prevent subsequent sin from destroying the fruits of previous spiritual living. King Benjamin taught his people that they had not only to *obtain* a forgiveness for sin, but to *retain* it as well:

As ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, . . . and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come. . . . And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins. (Mosiah 4:11–12)

Giving way to subsequent sins brings the return of former sins and their consequences (see D&C 82:7). Being steadfast in righteousness is an ongoing requirement of all who hope for salvation. Elder Bruce R. McConkie declared, “All the faithful Saints, all of those who have *endured to the end*, depart this life with the absolute guarantee of eternal life” (“Dead Who Die in the Lord” 107; emphasis added).

### *Personal Application of Principles*

After summarizing the conditions upon which the fathers had obtained their hope for salvation, Alma put the value of knowledge gleaned from the past into true perspective, giving it a personal and present application. Unapplied history is of little value.

Alma asked his listeners, “And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?” (Alma 5:14). Knowing how others attained a hope for salvation is useful only when we follow that same eternal pattern and experience for ourselves the spiritual rebirth and the mighty change of heart.

I once discussed with my wife what Alma might have meant when he referred twice to having God's image in our countenances. Specifically I asked her, "What is God's 'image'?" Her answer was, "It is a reflection of perfection." Many people assume that attaining perfection is reserved for some future life and most certainly is not possible to attain in this one. Yet the Savior commanded us mortals to become perfect. President Kimball explained that "being perfect means to triumph over sin. This is a mandate from the Lord. He is just and wise and kind. He would never require anything from his children which was not for their benefit and which was not attainable. Perfection therefore is an achievable goal" (*Miracle of Forgiveness* 209). Moroni closed the Book of Mormon record with this challenge:

Yea, come unto Christ, and be *perfected in him*, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be *perfect in Christ*; and if by the grace of God ye are *perfect in Christ*, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are *perfect in Christ*, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32-33; emphasis added)

Though we may lack many qualities of perfection, yet through Christ we can be as free from sin as he is. We can be perfect in this manner in this life through repentance. We can have the image of God in our countenances now.

### *Personal Future Expectations*

Alma continued his teaching with questions. They form a kind of checklist that determines if we really do have God's image in our countenances. He asked the Church members to look forward to the time of their judgment when everyone will stand before the Lord in one of three conditions:

1. The blessed. These individuals have repented and have been faithful to the conditions of salvation. Their "works have

been works of righteousness upon the face of the earth” (Alma 5:16).

2. The liars. These people are unrepentant, but think they can lie and misrepresent their works as having been righteous. They think such prevarication can obtain for them a hope of salvation (Alma 5:17).

3. The guilty. These people are also unrepentant, but they make no pretense of prevarication. They will find their souls “filled with guilt and remorse, having a . . . perfect remembrance of all [their] wickedness, yea, a remembrance that [they] have set at defiance the commandments of God” (Alma 5:18). Such persons cannot have hope for salvation.

As if to summarize what he had taught, Alma asked the all-encompassing question: “I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands?” (Alma 5:19). His question is a reminder that our souls are both physical and spiritual (see D&C 88:15) and that both need to be free from sin. David of old posed a similar question when he asked, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?” The answer? “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully” (Ps 24:3–4).

We are all responsible for controlling our physical bodies and behaving in accordance with standards of righteousness. In the waters of baptism, we establish covenants that conform to the example of Jesus Christ and His baptismal commitments. “But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, *according to the flesh* he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments” (2 Nephi 31:7; emphasis added). He promised to make his flesh obedient and his hands clean. His baptismal commitment “showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them” (2 Nephi 31:9). In almost unbelievable contrast, some think and express the idea that they are powerless

to change the innate desires of their flesh. They say, "The Lord made me this way and I can not help myself." Somehow, this rationalization is supposed to justify their yielding to fits of anger or succumbing to lusts of the flesh. Another contrast is provided by those who feel that they have been thrust into an evil world of sinful influences and thus cannot be expected to rise above their environment. But the Lord's injunction to Adam and Eve has never been repealed. "God blessed them, and said unto them: Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, *and subdue it, and have dominion*" (Moses 2:28; emphasis added). The Lord expects all of us to subdue our environment and control its effect upon our souls. Lehi taught that the Messiah would "redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to *act for themselves and not to be acted upon*" (2 Nephi 2:26; emphasis added). We are to act; we are responsible for our actions. The covenant people are required to subdue their flesh and thus have "clean hands."

Clean hands reflect pure thoughts and internal conditions, and are symbolized by the phrase *pure of heart*. No act was ever performed that did not originate as a thought in the mind. If we control our minds, we will control our bodies. What we do is predicated upon what we are. Our influence upon others is dependent upon our internal makeup. President David O. McKay said,

Every man and every person who lives in this world wields an influence, whether for good or for evil. It is not what he says alone; it is not alone what he does. It is what he is. Every man, every person radiates what he or she really is. ("Radiation" 373)

People with clean hands and pure hearts are those who have the "image of God engraven upon [their] countenances" (Alma 5:19).

### *Current Personal Condition*

Alma's next inquiry was directed to those who may have previously experienced the mighty change of conversion, but who may have lost that powerful influence in their current condition. He said, "And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?" (Alma 5:26). It is not enough to know or experience the gospel once. There must be an ongoing, constant feeding of the spirit, or the feelings that were once so predominantly a force within will die.

### *Further Inquiries*

Perhaps to provide a verification of worthiness, or to take inventory of current spiritual conditions, Alma asked some additional searching questions of his listeners. First, he asked about maintaining a state of blamelessness before God. In other words, have old habits crept back into our lifestyles, or have previously uncontrolled thoughts reestablished themselves and created inappropriate behavior? If so, our hands would not still be clean and our hearts would no longer be pure.

Next, he asked about humility and wondered if they had been stripped of pride. C. S. Lewis declared that "as long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you" (96). President Benson said that,

Pride does not look up to God and care about what is right. It looks sideways to man and argues who is right. . . . Pride is characterized by "What do I want out of life?" rather than by "What would God have me do with my life?" It is self-will as opposed to God's will. . . . Humility responds to God's will—to the fear of His judgments and the needs of those around us. To the proud, the applause of the world rings in their ears; to the humble, the applause of heaven warms their hearts. ("Cleansing the Inner Vessel" 6–7)



Pride is a stumbling block in the path of Christ's followers. As Alma said, "such an one hath not eternal life" (Alma 5:28).

Alma then asks about envy, which is mostly associated with worldly things. To set our minds on worldly things preempts having them on spiritual things. David Whitmer was chastised and Emma Smith was counseled on that subject (see D&C 30:2; 25:10). Worldly things cannot cleanse or save the soul. A mind saturated with or focused upon worldliness denies access to the Spirit and needs to be refocused on thoughts of virtue.

Finally, Alma inquired about those who mock their brother or persecute him. Professor Gary L. Bunker writes,

To mock is to humiliate, ridicule, insult, revile, make fun of, deride, sneer at, scorn, or hold in contempt. . . . Occasions for mockery usually occur in the context of real or imagined differences. Differences in beliefs, wealth, learning, social position, physical characteristics, group membership, and behavior may be used as pretexts for the justification of mockery. . . . Mockery costs our brother or sister severe physical and/or psychological pain. It also jeopardizes our hope of eternal life. Moreover, it is especially debilitating to those who have been called to serve. We cannot serve those for whom we have contempt. (36, 37, 41)

### *Personal Challenge*

Just before Alma reminded his listeners that he was speaking to Church members by way of commandment and to non-Church members by way of invitation (see Alma 5:62), he provided another insight. In addition to his battery of deeply personal and spiritually searching questions, Alma asked one more significant question, "And my beloved brethren, I say unto you, can ye withstand these sayings?" (Alma 5:53). To withstand them now is to stand without them forever. A mighty change is needed.

From President Benson has come the following challenge to change:

Can human hearts be changed? Why, of course! It happens every day in the great missionary work of the Church. It is one of the most

widespread of Christ's modern miracles. If it hasn't happened to you—it should. . . .

In addition to the physical ordinance of baptism and the laying on of hands, one must be spiritually born again to gain exaltation and eternal life. . . .

Would not the progress of the Church increase dramatically today with an increasing number of those who are spiritually reborn? Can you imagine what would happen in our homes? Can you imagine what would happen with an increasing number of copies of the Book of Mormon in the hands of an increasing number of missionaries who know how to use it and who have been born of God? When this happens, we will get the bounteous harvest of souls that the Lord promised. It was the "born of God" Alma who as a missionary was so able to impart the word that many others were also born of God. (See Alma 36:23–26). . . .

"Human nature *can* be changed, here and now," said President McKay, and then he quoted the following: "'You can change human nature. No man who has felt in him the Spirit of Christ even for half a minute can deny this truth. . . . You do change human nature, your own human nature, if you surrender it to Christ. Human nature has been changed in the past. Human nature must be changed on an enormous scale in the future, unless the world is to be drowned in its own blood. And only Christ can change it. Twelve men did quite a lot to change the world [nineteen hundred] years ago. Twelve simple men.'" (Quoting Beverly Nichols, in *Stepping Stones to an Abundant Life* 23, 127)

Yes, Christ changes men, and changed men can change the world. Men changed for Christ will be captained by Christ. Like Paul they will be asking, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6) Peter stated they will "follow his steps." (1 Peter 2:21) John said they will "walk, even as he walked." (1 John 2:6)

Finally, men captained by Christ will be consumed in Christ. To paraphrase President Harold B. Lee, they set fire in others because they are on fire. (*Stand Ye in Holy Places* 192)

Their will is swallowed up in his will. (See John 5:30) They do always those things that please the Lord. (See John 8:29) Not only would they die for the Lord, but more important they want to live for Him. . . .

President David O. McKay tells of a singular event that happened to him. After falling asleep, he said he "beheld in vision something

infinitely sublime." He saw a beautiful city, a great concourse of people dressed in white, and the Savior.

"The city, I understood, was his. It was the City Eternal; and the people following him were to abide there in peace and eternal happiness.

"But who were they?

"As if the Savior read my thoughts, he answered by pointing to a semicircle that then appeared above them, and on which were written in gold the words:

*"These Are They Who Have Overcome the World—Who Have Truly Been Born Again!"*

"When I awoke, it was breaking day." (*Cherished Experiences from the Writings of President David O. McKay* 59–60)

When we awake and are born of God, a new day will break and Zion will be redeemed.

May we be convinced that Jesus is the Christ, choose to follow Him, be changed for Him, captained by Him, consumed in Him, and born again. (*Witness* 62–66)

## Summary And Conclusion

We have spoken of a mighty change that occurred in our forebears, but the problems we face are now. We, too, need to go among the people, proclaim the word, and bear down in pure testimony. We, too, need to place hearts and hands in contact with iron rods of gospel truths.

The mighty change is the result of the process that starts with hearing the word of God. Every bearer of the higher priesthood is under a divine mandate to preach the gospel, which Paul said is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom 1:16). Jesus asked the elders of the Church, "Unto what were ye ordained?" In answer to his own question, he said, "To preach my gospel by the Spirit" (D&C 50:13–14). Unless parents, priesthood, and auxiliary leaders see to it that the word of the Lord is taught in and to families, members and non-members, there is no chance for them to experience the spiritual

rebirth. They will not have the power of God in their souls. They may be baptized and active, yet not be born again or responsive to the spiritual power. External motions may not reflect internal spiritual emotions.

We all must experience this mighty change of heart if we are to be more than “Cosmetic Mormons.” Our very countenances should reflect the image and perfection of God from an internalized spiritual rebirth. We must be spiritually alive here before we can hope to have salvation and eternal life hereafter.

My witness to you is that no one really understands the mighty change unless and until he or she has experienced it. It is not just a principle of the gospel, it is an experience with the gospel and each of us can have it. There is a power associated with it. The spirit within is real and it changes hearts and lives. I know it. I bear witness of Him from whom it comes. He lives.

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